



THE FIVE THINGS WE GET WRONG WHEN PITCHING FOR NEW BUSINESS

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When pitching for new business, we tend to act differently. It is quite acceptable to 'be on your best behaviour' when starting a new relationship. It requires some restraint and a degree of bravado, but to the extent that the latter does not cross the line into absurdity. Here are five common errors when pitching for new business.

1. Making it all about you

No one is really interested in your vision, mission and values, at least not in the way they are usually described on the inside front pages of annual reports. Although people like to know who they're dealing with, these sterile strategic statements push people away as opposed to drawing them in. I have sat through so many presentations where the list of values borders on the ridiculous – of course, you are an inclusive company, operating with honesty and integrity with the client's interest paramount. What drivel.

2. Thinking they'll remember you for more than one thing when you walk out the room

When Bill Clinton ran for president, he realised you always have to bring your message back to the one thing. In his case, it was the economy, with the result that posted on the door of his campaign office was the message "It's the economy stupid". So, if healthcare was the issue being discussed, he brought it back to the economy. If security was discussed, he brought it back to the economy. And when the economy was discussed (which was something everyone saw as a priority) it hit his sweet spot.

3. Not going all the way

This is somewhat paradoxical to the way you should behave when starting a new relationship. However, the prospective client does not want to hear what you are going to do – they want to see it. So here's the thing: this is one situation where you don't have to be right to win. Taking concepts (right or wrong) all the way to execution gives the client insight into how you think, because you don't get hired for getting it right; you get hired because the client feels you could get it right.



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4. Having no coherent structure

Not everyone is a great presenter, but you need to tell a story where your strategy emerges naturally. Showing how much homework you've done (and supporting Death by PowerPoint lobby), and then jumping across the chasm to a solution means you have taken the client across a tightrope with no safety net. The most important thing is clarity; a child should be able to follow your logic. Sir Gerry Robinson, the ninth of 10 children who came from a modest background and rose to be a captain of industry drives the point home: "There is no such thing as a great presenter; just a clear thinker".

5. There is no such thing as 'conditional enthusiasm'. You either want the account or you don't

When you walk into the room, you create an atmosphere – and clients can sense if you are all on the same page and hungry for the business. If there's tension or discord among the team, or even some reluctance among team members about what is being presented (or they feel the client is not a good fit), it affects the presentation a lot more than you think. Clients often make the decision to use you or not on how they feel about you, not only on the content you presented. "You had me at hello" is sometimes a very true aphorism.

About the author

Sid Peimer is the Executive Director of the Cape Chamber of Commerce & Industry. His book 'The Clear Win: Pitching for new business – the strategies that work; the myths that don't' can be found on Amazon [here](#)

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